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ABSTRACT

The Kuru Development Trust is a development support program that is owned and controlled by the communities in which the organization operates, the majority being San, or Bushmen, communities in the Kalahari region of Africa. Following a holistic approach to development, Kuru is involved in a wide range of activities, including income-generating projects, a savings and loan plan, cultural activities, a training program, and a preschool program. After almost a decade of experience in community development work, the Board members of the Kuru Development Trust wanted to enable their organization to serve a larger geographic area. Recognizing the tremendous problems that are encountered in grassroots community development programs in general, a clear and simple strategy was needed, one that would specifically make space for the cultural aspects of the San people. This working paper describes the efforts that were undertaken to define this strategy. The paper reviews lessons learned by Kuru over the years about community development, and describes the organization's study of different community development programs, particularly the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Gilgit, Pakistan. The paper then describes in detail what Kuru decided are crucial aspects of a community development strategy, which it adopted and called "community-owned development" in its move toward becoming a regional support organization. (EV)

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Braam le Roux

Community Owned Development

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About the Kuru Development Trust

The Kuru Development Trust is a development support programme that is owned and controlled by the communities where it works, the majority being San or Bushmen communities. Following a holistic approach to development, Kuru is involved in a wide range of activities. This includes income generating projects, a savings and loans scheme, cultural activities and a training programme. A pre-school project – the Bokamoso Pre-school Programme – falls under this training programme. In this project, mother tongue community members are trained as pre-school teachers, and communities are supported to run their own schools. Parents and home-based caregivers are trained and encouraged to manage their own pre-schools or care centres. People from 20 communities are presently undergoing training as pre-school teachers. The overall strategy of Kuru – outlined in this paper – is such that the communities should be able to start and run their own pre-schools through the savings funds they have accumulated from their own income generating projects. Only after starting a savings fund do they qualify for support from Kuru for their pre-school.

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The Bernard van Leer Foundation is one of several donors to the Kuru Development Trust. It has been funding the Trust's pre-school programme since the early 1990s.

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About this paper

After almost a decade of experience in community development work, the Board members of the Kuru Development Trust came to realise that they needed to place their organisation in a position that would support the survival of the San in a much larger geographical area. Kuru started as the development organisation of the D'Kar community. Now it wanted to become a support programme to many more communities. To do this Kuru needed to look at the lessons it had learned over the years, and develop a clear strategy for its new role. Kuru studied various different programmes, but it was a visit to the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Gilgit, Pakistan, that really helped it to form a vision for the development work amongst the San people of Southern Africa. The result is this paper which has been adopted as the development strategy of both Kuru and the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa.

About the author

Braam le Roux was born in South Africa in 1951. He has lived, together with his wife, Willemien, and their three children, in a small bushmen village in western Botswana since 1982. He originally went to Botswana as a missionary, but in 1990 became a full time community development facilitator. He became the first Coordinator of the Kuru Development Trust and facilitated together with others, the creation of the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa, a regional San network organisation, working in six different countries with San communities.

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22

Braam le Roux

Community Owned Development

amongst the marginalised San communities of the Kalahari, as adopted by a San community development organisation, the Kuru Development Trust.

Bernard van Leer Foundation, *March 1998*

INTRODUCTION

The so-called 'San' or 'Bushmen of the Kalahari'[1] of southern Africa, spread out in small groups over six countries, constitute one of the last few remaining hunter-gatherer cultures on earth. One of their most remarkable characteristics is that they have always been masters of survival techniques for living in and with nature while almost not disturbing it at all. Yet they are now engaged in their most serious struggle for survival, trying to enter the next century as a people. Due to the many changes to their environment by encroaching 'civilisation', most of them today live in conditions of desperate poverty and dependency, following the loss of access to natural resources and the tension that comes with a forced change of lifestyle within one or two generations.

The network organisation of the San in southern Africa – the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa (WIMSA) – has set as one of its goals to facilitate or implement community development programmes that will involve the communities from the planning stage, in order to enhance their quality of life rather than simply looking at programmes that would put more money into people's pockets.

Recognising the tremendous problems that are encountered in grassroots community development programmes in general, WIMSA wanted to implement a clear and simple strategy for rural development, which would specifically make space for the cultural aspects of the San people. This document is an effort to indicate the grounds that have been broken in that direction.

One of the partner or member organisations of WIMSA is the Kuru Development Trust – or Kuru – which is a community development organisation that was formed by and is owned by the San. Over the past ten years of Kuru's existence, certain lessons concerning the concept 'community owned development' were learned that made use of the experiences with and of the San communities in Botswana, and were built upon its specific development experience. In this paper I would like to take you, in a very summarised way, through the development concepts as they were discovered by all of us involved in the different stages of the process. I have to point out that momentum was gained and certain thoughts reinforced by learning

1 The words 'San' and 'Bushmen' are unknown to the people themselves, who prefer to be called by their own group names, for example Ncǫpakhoe for the Naro. At a recent Board meeting of WIMSA, however, representatives from various groups agreed to accept the anthropological term 'San' as an interim umbrella name

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from the development strategies that I have come across during study tours in other areas, especially those of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Pakistan. There is surely a culture of poverty around the world that brings affected communities from places far apart to similar patterns of behaviour, so that it makes sense to learn from other programmes, even though they are working amongst communities differing very much in other ways. Some basic aspects of their experiences have proved to be replicable amongst the San and are incorporated into this paper.

Kuru has played the role of a beacon of hope to people who had given up on having control over their lives. Many people have been trained and have developed appropriate skills; many have started their own businesses; many have acquired land; many have discovered their own culture and self-esteem; all through the different programmes of Kuru. New organisations were born, like the First People of the Kalahari and the WIMSA, through the combined visions people developed at Kuru and elsewhere.

Out of the Kuru experience we are now hoping to contribute a community owned development strategy that should be replicable in the rest of the region, as well as amongst other peoples who are suffering the effects of dependency and poverty. Although much of it is based on the cultural traits of the San, we are hoping that it can be used much more widely!

History of the Kuru strategy

Each development approach or style of operation always has some kind of history. In the same way, the present strategy of Kuru has a specific and meaningful history. It is often perceived from the African perspective that development workers from Europe and North America must have studied it all at some university in the North and that they are going to lead communities out of the dark in no time. In most cases this expectation does not reflect reality.

If we look at the NGO community in general we see that the organisations that do get off the ground, were usually able to progress because local people who had a vision and the drive to do something, were involved in the process. These people usually do not have access to the world's accumulated knowledge on the issues they are dealing with, so they often either have to re-invent the wheel again and again, or have to do without the wheel. Donor organisations often have access to the applied knowledge that local organisations and governments could use, but most of the time they are unable to communicate it, especially to the grassroots organisations.

As for the Kuru story, it would be more accurate to talk of its history as a happening or a stumbling process! We took the long route of slow discovery, unwittingly mostly following a process approach. Kuru was not in the fortunate position to begin its development work with people who had had previous experience of development work. We had no blueprint, no model, no theories to follow. We started to get involved in a development process simply because we were people thrown together, sharing life in the same village. My wife and I were sent by a mission church to support a new, young church in Botswana, on the D'Kar farm in the Ghanzi district of Botswana. We had not in the least been prepared for our roles as facilitators of a development process, nor did we have any other understanding of what 'helping the people' would entail at any given stage except for our principles and faith. What did have an influence on our understanding of our roles in the community later, was our meeting with Professors Tom and Betty-Sue Brewster within the first year of moving to D'Kar. They were running courses around the world in 'Language and Culture Acquisition'. We were introduced to various ideas new to us at the time: 'You are not taking God to the

Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

people, He has been there long before you', and 'the best way to learn about people's values and skills is to make yourself completely dependent on them' and so on. Indeed we still see them as our true mentors because they helped us to get a closer insight into other cultures and taught us how to get into a position where we were trusted and from where we could work as insiders. This included moving in with a San family in a settlement in Hanahai for various lengths of time, over a period of one and a half years.

Later we came into contact with several development administrators from Europe, especially the Netherlands, who introduced us to the principles of the 'Folk High Schools' in the Netherlands and in Denmark which were based on the ideas of Father Grundvig. From this we learned about the important roles these training institutions had played in the development of the people of Europe, and the importance of cultural self-esteem in the development of people. These friends later formed a support organisation, the Kalahari Support Group, which has provided technical and moral support over many years. During the same period a group of our personal friends and relatives from South Africa formed the D'Kar Foundation, which for many years fundraised to meet some of the institutional costs each year. Although it was never a large amount of money, it could be applied to whatever the current needs were, which was invaluable for the process at the time. In the early years of Kuru there were no donors involved, and much of the work would never have come off the ground if it were not for these people, as well as several others who came to work in the short-term literally for food only, and shared their lives with the community in a self-sacrificing way.

To a lesser extent we were also introduced to the development theories of Paolo Freire. We found that we could implement these theories particularly well in the circumstances in which Kuru is working, especially in addressing the apathy that the communities were suffering from. This process led to a highly politicised response from the participants. While at the time it could not have been avoided and may even have been necessary, political frustrations have proven not to be a good basis on which to build community cohesion and productivity, as they easily become a destructive spirit and people too often start fighting one another instead of concentrating on building a new future together.

As for the rest, with the community as the classroom and with the years going by, projects started up, failed and started up again. We saw that there were processes that people had to grow through, processes that could not be skipped if people were to understand and believe in what they were doing. Plans had to be flexible to allow for the stages participants found themselves in.

After an initial stage of apathy, the San community in D'Kar on its side brought a strong willingness to change the social order around it. The community members were more than responsive to any idea which would indicate that they had their own rights, their own histories and cultures and that it was not wrong to have their own specific identity. Even just a basic discussion around these issues at the time proved that these were the things that made them 'click'. Through trial and error we were together slowly addressing the issue of a better quality of life for the marginalised peoples.

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Or were we? As people built more permanent houses, got into training programmes, managed their own small businesses, earned much more cash, and confidently began to voice their own needs on various platforms, so the alcohol abuse and violence increased and relationships within and between families came under growing pressure. The inequality in income caused by the differences in success of the individuals, made it very difficult to get people to work constructively together in order to 'make' a new future as a community, through hard work. Even today, at this point in time, the driving force in the community is still far too reactionary and negative. Too much energy is being spent on issues related to damaged relationships due to the above mentioned factors.

In the management of Kuru we began to search extensively and even desperately for answers that would take the San communities on the road to sustainable development and a better quality of life through a holistic development programme - not just a cash income. This search lead to an eighteen month process of self-evaluation and also to a physical assessment by the Kuru Board of the situation of the San in the region. Some radical changes took place, and it was decided to implement the strategy as explained here. Kuru changed from being the development organisation of one community, into a regional development support programme.

Braam le Roux

Amounts are given in Botswana Pula. The exchange rate used (January 1998) is BWP 1 = USD 0.53.

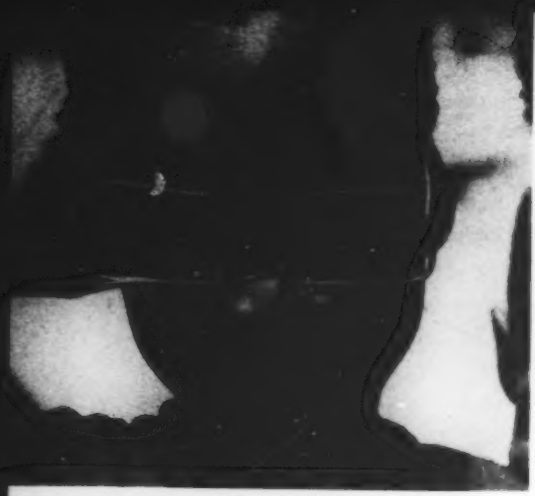

Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

COMMUNITY OWNED DEVELOPMENT: a strategy for improving the quality of life amongst the marginalised San communities of the Kalahari, as adopted by a San community development organisation, the Kuru Development Trust.

Some development tools and strategies arrived at over the years

Introduction

When I say that 'we' arrived at specific solutions and policies, I am constantly referring to a team of people who have shared their destinies at D'Kar for some time. Later, when donors and development agencies joined us in the process, professional people came for three year periods, and they also made important inputs. But the team mostly consisted of a core group of 15 to 20 people who have been working together constantly for 13 years now. Except for myself, my wife Willemien and Gaolatlhe Thupe, they all describe themselves as Nc̄akhoe (which in the Naro language means 'Red People' and is used to refer to all the San). The names of Magu Magu, Tshabu Tānse, Selinah Magu, Gaobolelwe Ngakayeaya, Aron Johannes, Morris Morris and Thopi Caru have to be mentioned as elders from the San community who carried the idea that there has to be a better future for their children through very depressed times. During this time we have been confronted by a changing world around us, and we have been confronting each other in many different ways. A good 30 per cent of our time together went into meetings and discussions. So in the end it is not possible or important to say who said what any more, only that this is my interpretation of the solutions that we all have arrived at!

To make you part of the process we went through, we will now discuss some of the truths we have arrived at or stumbled upon through discussions and practical experiences during the years.

An indigenous development organisation

In the early years of Kuru we did not ask too many questions about what structures should be set up. We were more interested in the organic growth of the participants and the projects.

After a few years it did become necessary to think about structures. At the time we struggled with the question of whether we should form one or two organisations. If we formed two organisations, one could be a specialist development support organisation and the other could be the local village organisation. The specialist organisation would then have as its goal the support of the village organisation. The other option was to form one organisation with all the skills inside it. Amongst other things the last option had the practical implication that all personnel would have to be on the same salary scale. This took some consideration because we would have some people with more than one university degree and others with no formal education at all, the latter paying the salaries of the former! I guess the ideological challenge in this made it very attractive to us, who were still struggling to prove our 'Africanness' and who wanted to emphasise that we were all contributing different skills which were equally important.

One of the principles we accepted was that the developing people themselves should, as much as possible, be in control of the processes they found themselves in. They should themselves indicate what they understand development to be, and should work as activists, motivating their own people. We understood that the best way to empower them to do this would be to work from within the same organisation. Skills training and dialogue would take place on a day-to-day and on-the-job basis. The idea was further to bring the people into direct contact with their resources, be they donors, technology, knowledge, rights and so on.

And so the first Indigenous People's Development Organisation for the San in Botswana was formed in 1986. This step was necessary after the different projects which had already been operating under the local Church Council since 1983 had become too much for the Church Council to manage. A local Board for Kuru was constituted out of the San in the community, with the task to control the organisation. All staff were employed by them. Especially in the beginning, this was an ideal situation. We were all working on low salaries, there were no overseas volunteers and almost no donor money. We got credit from a local shop which enabled us to purchase goods to start production and we had to repay every month end with goods manufactured.

The custom in Botswana at the time was that the Board of every NGO should include government functionaries as members. The decision we came to, however, was that the only way to let the people experience real control over their own development process was to let them manage the project with as little outside interference as possible. So the Kuru Board had only San members.

Spirituality and community development

This section is added for reasons of transparency and better understanding of the identity of Kuru and also because for too long it has been assumed that spirituality has nothing to do with community development. It is not pretended here at all that there is total clarity in everybody's mind of how this subject of religion and spirituality should be dealt with. We are intensely aware of the fact that, although Kuru is a San response to their own problems, it is also part of a process which might eventually determine the survival or destruction of the San as people who carry a specific identity. Kuru, as a San development organisation, has always been on a journey to determine its own spirituality as well as to react to that of a wide variety of communities, knowing that this factor is important in the whole development debate.

The original motive of the D'Kar community, which was to begin with projects that would support one another, sprung from its Christian faith. The D'Kar community especially had

been exposed to the Christian church since the early 1960s, but the same applies to various other communities. Two things are important in understanding the present situation. First, the D'Kar community is seeking a spirituality that would be relevant for them for their lives of today. Whatever they and the Board decides will be their own decision. Second, religion is on the agenda of the San no less than it is on the agenda of other African people. To make a division between people's daily lives and struggles and their spiritual beliefs is just not possible or natural, especially in the African context.

The historical process of the evolution of Kuru has been that from the beginning it was part of the local San church institution. Kuru was founded by the San church members as their effort to find a solution to the poverty situation of the D'Kar community, and soon grew as it responded to all the challenges surrounding it. As it expanded and became more complex and specialised, the church council decided to create a separate institution next to the church in order to deal with development issues. Kuru made its own constitution. One task was to serve the community's struggle for survival, especially against poverty. Another was to empower its members to take control of their own lives and to make their own plans to improve their quality of life and to implement these themselves. Kuru never had the task of evangelising or proselytising, but since initially most of the members were of the local church, the organisation did carry a certain Christian atmosphere.

Up to today many members of Kuru, locals and others, are motivated by their Christian belief to address the problems of the San. Kuru remains sensitive and respectful of people's religious needs because this is a normal policy for a people's organisation. In the early days the church council formed the Board of Kuru, and the situation has since changed twice. When Kuru became a separate village organisation from the church, the church still maintained three of the nine members of the Board. Again when Kuru later became a regional support organisation, as more and more settlements were added, more Board members were added. At present the Board has 19 members, of which the church still appoints three. The reason for this is of course that the people recognise the important roles that the local church has played as the founder of Kuru, as an activist in the people's struggle against injustice, and in providing some stability in the composition of the Board.

The more difficult part in the discussion is whether religion or spirituality should be seen as part of a holistic approach in a development strategy or not. In general it could be said that the answer to this question can only come from the local communities themselves. Their identities will differ from place to place and so their motivational force will differ in each of these places. So, while Kuru does not evangelise in the Christian sense of the word, its position is also not to shy away from communities because of certain religious motivations they might have, be it Christian or traditional or something else, but to respect these as an integrated part of the communities' world view.

Our experience seems to indicate that community development work cannot be truly successful unless it is grounded in some kind of spirituality. Unless as development workers we understand the spiritual identity of a community, the possibility is there that our work might be successful in an economic way, but destructive for community life as a whole. In the case of the San for example, we have to understand their spiritual ties to the land. For many years they have been misunderstood as being nomads who travelled forever and seldom returned to previous places. The fact is however, that each group was moving inside a specific area only, to give the land the opportunity to become 'fat' again.

Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

They really had a 'land use management plan' that was more modern and successful than people, especially pastoralists, have been able to understand up to now. In contrast to the 'developed' world, they were not subduing the earth by turning all resources into polluting factories, but they were living in unison with it. Their co-existence on the land with the plants and animals determined their world view and value system and these aspects lay at the centre of the San's spiritual identity. If we understand this, we will understand the depth of the problem when people were uprooted from their land and lose their access to the natural resources and areas to which their identity was tied, while they are simply being offered an opportunity for economic survival as an alternative.

At the present moment the situation for the San is very confusing. In their previous lives, abundance, harmony and peace meant spiritual union with God. For many, the uprootedness of their circumstances today, is an indication that their Creator has forsaken them. At the same time they are also bombarded from all sides with several different forms of 'stronger' non-San spiritual influences, such as spiritual healers from other tribes like the Humbukushu, the Herero and Batswana. These people's ancestral beliefs, as well as the so-called Christian, spiritual message of western society's consumer 'religion', create an equally strong force in their daily lives. Therefore it has been part of the Kuru strategy to establish a development aspect in tandem with a cultural component which documents and displays traditional and spiritual values and knowledge, so that these things will still be there when the people might one day turn around and ask for them again.

In the meantime, the development workers and expatriates working in Kuru, while realising that their presence most certainly has an influence on people's attitudes and lives, are humbled by the realisation that their influence is only one on a wide palette of choices, and that the final choice of who they want to become spiritually will be determined by the people themselves.

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Administration and management

To solve the problem we had with the local people lacking skills to manage and administer the programme, outside staff from volunteer organisations were soon recruited to be employed under the Kuru Board. The principle was that the Board should be able to internalise the whole programme, see it as its own development organisation, and control all personnel. To do this a system of weekly Board meetings was introduced. However, when management issues recently became too many and too difficult, it was decided to have a management committee to take over the weekly meetings and to let them only report back to the Board once a month. A normal management meeting would be attended by the project coordinator, the training coordinator, the Board's Action Committee, the secretary of the Council and the farm manager.

At the same time efforts were made to recruit as many local people as staff members as possible, so that they could get in-service training. There were some spectacular successes where people with the minimum of schooling became capable of, for example, doing rather sophisticated bookkeeping, or contributing remarkable leadership skills. But mostly it has been a very slow process to develop the necessary capacities amongst the local village level staff.

In retrospect we can see that we were on the right track with the Board being in control and with the regular meetings. The one thing really lacking was that the project participants stayed outside a lot of the things that were happening. The Board started to become an elitist group of 'insiders' and distance was created between them and the rest of the community. This process hampered the community's ownership of Kuru. Remarkable efforts were made to keep the Board informed and in control, but transparency towards the community became a huge problem.

Longterm involvement

One of the most significant factors in the Kuru story is that a core group of people on the staff have made long-term commitments to the people's development process. A realistic expectation of the time period it would take a grassroots community to arrive at self-sustainability, based on our present experience, is that it would not be less than 15 to 20 years. Only then can we expect completely marginalised groups to arrive at some point of sustainability. Another important experience has been the true meaning of partnership with donors who want to support the development process and who give enough freedom, as well as intellectual and moral support to programmes. The important aspect of a memory of the process can only be established through longterm relationships.

Process approach

The pace of development should be dictated by the position the participants find themselves in at any given time. No further steps should be taken with a group it is has not mastered its present situation. It is also not wise to let people skip certain experiences. A group generally would do better to go bankrupt than to have money artificially given to them to 'save' a certain project. There should be flexibility in the management and project planning to allow for changes from place to place and from project to project. It would be very helpful if donors would be willing to show a greater understanding of this aspect of the development process.

'Small is beautiful'

This well known concept has been proved to be correct over and over again. No project should start on a level that is above the capacity of its participants. The moment you go above people's abilities you lose transparency as well as effective ownership or responsibility of the project by the participants.

Holistic approach

While we started very much programme oriented, we slowly realised that the situation of the people actually demanded much more than, for example, technical skills on how to tan hides. Appropriate training on skills such as leadership, literacy, or record keeping, were in high demand. After all, once you have products, you need marketing facilities and training. If it is a people's organisation, they will be expecting the organisation to address their needs over a very broad spectrum. At certain stages of their empowerment many participants cannot think of things other than from a political perspective. In order to keep the peoples' confidence and trust, a grassroots programme cannot easily refrain from the people's total struggle towards a better quality of life.

Service centre for income generating projects

With the remoteness of the settlements from retailers and markets, it is unreasonable to expect the individual participant to find the raw materials for his/her programme, to find the transport to the nearest shops, go back to the settlement, manufacture the articles and again go and find the market for it.

A service centre where raw materials such as seeds, chemicals, or tools can be kept in stock is very important as a backup for any remote area development plan. This centre should also help individual producers so that marketing can be done co-operatively. Membership fees should be paid by individuals or by programmes. The service centre should be in reach of the settlements or there should be a kind of mobile service that can be combined with other activities. A savings programme could also be supported by the service centres.
There are other examples where mobile shops provided helpful services to remote communities. At the same time they might be used as mobile banks and to purchase crafts.

Self-employment

Obvious as it may seem, it took us quite a while to realise the importance of self-employment. Even a people's organisation very soon becomes just another employer and the idea of co-operative production does not sound very attractive when people are still not satisfied with their individual incomes or do not understand how the management side of things works.
Especially where a culture of productivity still has to be established, self-employment is the best way for people to learn that income is related to input. The principle Kuru follows is that as far as possible people should work for themselves, their families or in closely-knit interest groups.

Training programme

The development of skills is a crucial and integrated part of rural development. As programmes develop, various new and different skills are needed. A rural development programme needs a direct link to a training programme to help the staff and participants cope with all the different needs they meet.
Training should be culturally specific and flexible to cater to the changing situations of participants. Short courses of two to three days, that provide boarding and are followed up monthly, have proved to work the best in the Ghanzi situation.

Cultural programme

A cultural programme serves several purposes.

- Defining development is in the first place culturally bound. Participants need to look at their roots to examine their own social organisation and their own values, and to determine where development should take them.

- It is especially important for the young people to have a cultural identity as it gives them self-confidence in their relations with other groups.
- Especially in cases where we struggle with growing violence, theft, AIDS and alcoholism, it is important to have discussions about traditional values, religion and ethics.

Interest groups

In general, people work together better when they share the same interests. This could mean a family group, age groups, a language group, a religious group, a women's group or any other natural groupings. The different cultures usually play decisive roles in what kind of interest group would be workable. We have established that it is of cardinal importance to secure harmonious relationships within communities.

Mobilisers/activists

It has always been Kuru's idea to use people from the local villages, who speak the local languages, as facilitators in mobilising participants. In practice this was not pursued enough. The identification of people who are able to work at grassroots level is a crucial factor in rural development. Unfortunately they are very scarce. We need highly motivated local workers that share the vision of sustainable development at village level.

The conclusion is that we have to look harder to find local people. Even if they are not able to read and write, they could be trained to obtain the minimum technical skills that might be needed for their positions.

Tough approach

There is something fundamentally wrong when NGOs or government hand out things like food and clothes for free to people. In no programme should this ever be supported. The result of this kind of aid is so contradictory to sustainable development that the government should try to promote a unanimous strategy to stop any kind of hand-outs by itself and NGOs alike to the rural communities.

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Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

REMAINING PROBLEMS

Introduction

To my mind the above are some of the important truths that we have discovered through field experience over the years. They are not new. But experiencing them in the field has given them new priority positions on our list. Still there are many problems remaining as described earlier on (see page 2 'History of the Kuru strategy'). It is only in seeing those problem areas clearly that we will make future progress. Especially as far as the marginalised minorities are concerned: not much is known about these problems from other sources, therefore we have to look to our own experiences for answers to the problems we are encountering.

Most important at this stage, is to acknowledge the fact that much still remains to be settled. In spite of the wonderful tools that we have discovered, we are struggling with very serious problems. Our willingness to recognise these and to deal with them as best we can, will determine if our involvement in the lives of the communities can be justified at all. Here follows a summarised analysis of the problem areas among the San and other minorities that we are still encountering and trying to deal with through the new Kuru strategy.

Inequality

San communities are known for their egalitarian social structures. When a community enters into a development project, all its members expect to benefit from it equally. If right from the beginning an imbalance in incomes and benefits is apparent, the whole effort stands in danger of being jeopardised by jealousy and broken relationships. It has been said that the San people still have to develop the social skills to deal with jealousy. Unnatural inequality that is created among the participants will make it very difficult for the community to manage the organisation in a co-operative way.

Transparency

Although extraordinary efforts are sometimes made to make an organisation transparent to all villagers and to all participants, once it has become too complex and big for the skills of the participants, transparency becomes impossible to maintain.

Transparency becomes a problem once you move faster than the capacities of the people allow. This leads to various other problems as people will no longer trust the finances of the project, and they will not take ownership or responsibility if they feel they do not understand the project.

Transparency is also hampered when the control of the organisation is put into the hands of a selected few. The San culture of participatory democracy presses for the involvement of all participants in decision-making. Although this is not the most practical way to manage an organisation, it is essential that during the early years of a project the participants should be pressurised to meet regularly with all participants present. Unless such an opportunity is created people will not see the project as transparent.

Capitalism and a cash economy

It has already been said that the inequality now created amongst participants is intensified because it is a specific cultural problem in the traditionally egalitarian San communities. The jealousy created has the potential to destroy relationships within communities.

No lasting solution has been reached to help people to value or understand cash money. In many cases there is no difference between the individual earning BWP 400 a month, or the one earning BWP 2,000 a month. By the second week both would have no money left. The few that do grasp the value of money, very soon use it only for their own benefit, and so create tension and disharmony.

As long as the San are working in an environment where 'other' people control all money, also project money, they will not learn how to work with money themselves. At this stage the majority thinks that money is something that 'other' people have and they either owe it to the San or if you ask for it long enough you will get your share. This problem is worsened by hand-outs and by aid programmes lacking transparency. Hands-on learning of numeracy and understanding of a cash economy is needed, although experience has proved this to be one of the toughest training areas.

Dependency

In an environment where other people control the money, the land, the wildlife, the labour market, the school system, the political environment and so on, it is almost inevitable that the San will have a dependency syndrome. Dependency will only stop once people become successful and can exercise some control over their environment. Once again this points at our duty to put control into their hands and to refrain from making decisions on their behalf or to take responsibilities away from them.

Leadership and representation

As mentioned, the San are struggling to get used to the fact that they can delegate responsibility to leaders, and that leaders can make some decisions on behalf of the group or the community.

This is not to say that the San do not have leadership. The type of leadership they have, however, does not allow for one person to stand out too much. As soon as a person is singled out too much for whatever reason, the group will pour out their disapproval on him or her to 'level' the society again.

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As a result it seems to the rest of the world that the San do not have leaders or an effective way to manage their own affairs. As a matter of fact, they normally manage their affairs by reaching consensus and in this process each individual's viewpoint counts. Individuals, however, if given a more dynamic leadership position, either withdraw or are marginalised by the rest of the group, becoming very unpopular with everybody. At Kuru we have devised the practice of using at least two people in positions that require any kind of representation. At least two would go to a conference, and for some important positions in an organisation there would be two to three counterparts for one person. This certainly diminished or postponed tensions within the organisation. Our other compromise plan, the formation of committees, has also only partly solved the problem. Committees tend to form a group of their own that claims benefits for themselves and forgets about representing others. As a result the San feel that they are usually 'provided' with leaders from other groups by the government and NGOs.

The situation nowadays is that neither individuals nor committees have been able to take responsibility for leading groups bigger than their own families effectively without harming the relationships within the society. In government settlements and many other organisations, they have been getting used to the idea that other people take responsibility for them, which means that they can be inactive.

'Qualified expert staff' and village level experts

There is always a shortage of qualified local personnel. As a solution we have been making use of expatriate volunteers both within the government and the NGO sectors. This has brought short-term management solutions, but it has also created several problems. In most cases the use of volunteers has made the process of development impossible for the grassroots communities to keep up with. Through donor funding and volunteer management, projects grew too big, too fast. Another problem is that the accumulated knowledge of rural development leaves the country as soon as the volunteers go home and it remains with donor agencies or overseas government development agencies. These are not always capable of transferring this knowledge back to the third world countries. It has also been our experience that, because of the wide cultural gap, volunteers often only become capable of communicating in local languages and working effectively in the third world after three or four years, and this would often be just before they have to leave.

We have to address the question: are the expert staff members playing a positive role at all inside the local organisational structures, or should they only be part of a support structure? We have not been able to make the best use of the expertise in the villages. Perhaps the presence of outside development workers in the villages has been too strong. The expertise that has enabled people to survive for thousands of years still exists and it should be possible to create an environment in which it will thrive again. It is also important to understand that the different skills in the communities have always been respected. A good hunter was recognised for his skills, as was a good tracker, and the whole village benefited from their success. I am sure villagers are still able to identify such people. In many cases we will be looking for formally 'uneducated', but traditionally educated adults to be the community motivators.

Capacity restriction

It is slowly becoming clear that development should depend on the skills of a community. It should only increase in complexity as the community increases its skills. Any development strategy must have a training strategy planned as a basic component of its development activities. In a holistic strategy that is giving attention to the quality of life, the training

component will be open to a very wide scope of needs. It will include, alongside skills training, aspects such as cultural values and the meaning of life.

Replicability

The question, in terms of replicability, is whether we have a strategy to offer other communities outside the existing programmes. We have all been falling around discovering old truths through very difficult processes. Have we now established anything in the region out of which conceptual principles can be offered to government and NGOs as being replicable in similar circumstances? We need a plan that will be relatively cheap to implement and is also able to reach many different communities at the same time.

The community at the end of the line

We all agree that our goal is to achieve a self-sustaining rural community. In practice it often seems that organisations that are trying to help the communities, are more geared towards their own survival as an organisation, than to the empowerment of the people at the grassroots.

Governments try to be popular and to stay in the seat. NGOs have to direct most of their energies at keeping the donors happy with reports and requesting new funds. NGOs all know the frustration of having to design a new programme or an expansion of an existing one, just in order to get the funds to help pay the office bills. Instead of waiting for the community to catch up, these kinds of expansion are often done for the survival of the organisation!

This has to change. The field orientation of programmes should get more attention than the office work. Field staff as well as management have to spend more time in the field. There should be capable people in the office to take care of the office and to free senior staff members to be in the field.

Planning for rural development should happen in the field together with communities. Staff of the support programme should be able to speak the local languages. The village must be involved in making, executing and evaluating their own plans.

Capital for development

This point connects with the dependency phenomenon mentioned earlier. It is recognised

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everywhere that capital inputs are needed to help marginalised communities to compete with other economies of scale in the world. However, easy access to 'other people's money' more often than not creates misunderstanding, especially when people are not really used to capitalism and cash economies. The impression is created that money is not worth much and that you get it by crying out loud enough! If you do not have it, it means that you are being cheated somehow!

The only alternative is the truth of reality. To support self-sustainability people will have to start working with their own money. The accumulation of the communities' own development funds has to get our serious attention. It must be possible to establish a savings system through very small contributions that would help villages build up their own capital.

Service centres

Products that are manufactured need to be marketed. To ensure good quality products, the correct raw materials must be available. These basic services have to be provided to every group that starts a viable programme. Without services like these, all inputs in training would be wasted and programmes are not likely to compete with other producers. While the support organisation should provide these services where they do not exist, the long-term vision should be to have a cooperative marketing plan or structure in position.

Alcohol and drug abuse

Perhaps it is time to be honest about the magnitude of the problem alcohol is creating, especially amongst the youth. It is heartbreaking to see how much of people's hard earned money is wasted on alcohol, how many promising future leaders turn into drunken wife-beaters. In D'Kar alone there is one illegal shebeen[2] for every thirty people in the village! In all the San settlements people from outside are operating flourishing shebeens. Under such circumstances we must realise that alcohol abuse is standing in the way of village mobilisation towards self-development.

2 An illegal drinking house

Gender

Gender and development has been barely addressed up to now as it was not on the agenda of the people. In the past the San culture was known for the highly valued role the women played in all issues. This was mainly due to the fact that they contributed 90 per cent of the families' food intake by collecting *veld* (wild) food. Today this role has almost been nullified, and with it the social role of women diminished.

To restore the broken harmony, any development support programme will have to give special attention to the issue of gender and development. The question for us to answer is whether it will be possible to address this within the community organisations, or if it should be done through separate women's organisations? Obviously the gender problem needs to be deeply analysed and San women will need a lot of support to participate in the decision-making and problem-solving processes.

A culturally specific approach or not?

One of the most difficult choices that has to be made is whether it is best to follow an ethnic approach or not. We know that there are many culturally specific problems to community development. In the case of Kuru it is clear that the organisation belongs to the San and will therefore give special attention to their cultural issues. Still, ethnicity has become a politically sensitive issue in many countries. It might help to distinguish between a culturally sensitive programme and one that discriminates against certain ethnic groups. At this stage, it should be clear to all that to ignore certain specific cultural issues in the case of the San people would just make their struggle against poverty more difficult, as has been the case where there has been discrimination against them for belonging to a certain group.

Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The requirements

Again let me say that we were looking at the conceptual side of a development programme. Out of our own experience, and in order to address the problems discussed above, we have gathered that the most important issues in establishing a replicable model amongst the San for sustainable rural development that will lead to a better quality of life are the following.

- The re-evaluation of the community organisations or interest group organisations. They are the very end of the line and not the development organisation or aid organisations. These community organisations should be supported in an effort to make them self-sustaining. They should be empowered to own the development process they opt for. Our focus should go back to them for that is where all our efforts fall or stand. We should know from the beginning that the role of the support organisations has to be terminated in the long run, while the community organisations should become self-sustaining.

- A catalyst organisation is needed to help the communities to achieve this. Successful implementation by a support organisation is again dependent on a steady and long-term commitment by policy makers and donors. The villagers cannot free themselves from their present situations of poverty. It is another question whether the support organisation should be community-based or not. If it is community-based, it will take a lot of input as far as training and information is concerned to keep the Board at a level where it will be transparent to the community. This has been the case with Kuru. The easiest way for the management of the support organisation would be to have a Board with experts on it that would be able to keep some distance from what is happening from day to day.

- For the sake of sustainability of the community organisations it is better to have a tough approach by the support organisation on issues of principle. Clear cut goals should be pursued, for example there should be clear conditions laid down for both sides. If these are

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not met, for example, when a community shows no commitment to attend regular meetings or to contribute to a savings fund, the relationship should be temporarily stopped. This will give communities the option to decide whether they want to enter into or continue a relationship with the support organisation. Before they enter a partnership with the support organisation, the communities should know as far as possible where this relationship could lead to.

- The present skills of the villagers should determine the kind of organisation that they can form. The development of their skills should dictate the complexity of the organisation. Whatever development strategy is followed, the principle of 'small is beautiful' will have to be integrated at the grassroots level.

  One of the strategies that was implemented in our region recently was based on the idea of placing committed development workers in communities to act as the catalysts that would accompany the communities in a development process. There are a number of examples where development workers have done outstanding work. However, if we look at the scale of the problem we soon realise that it is not possible to place enough people to serve 150 communities! Besides the fact that it will simply not be affordable, it seems that placing outsiders in communities naturally enhances the dependency of these communities on outside help. One of the key factors we were looking for was how to work on the level a community can understand and manage themselves with as little outside help as possible, while at the same time we would have the organisational capacity to address the problem on as many settlements as possible.

- The model we are presently adopting should lead us to equitable development. Given the cultures of equality we are working within, a model must be found that will lead us to a situation where people at least have equal access to support and resources and where, especially in the early years, there will not be unnecessary differences in income between the participants.

- The model should give us an answer to the leadership problem. Management structures and committees are not trusted. Co-operative management of the community and their resources must be further examined so that we can have a truly democratic model in which people participate rather than are represented.

- Donor capital will come to an end sooner or later. People need to build up their own capital for development, the sooner the better. We should not be discouraged by the fact that people are extremely poor and that it might take twenty years to reach anything like self-sustainable communities.

- We are desperately in need of two kinds of people who will play a vital role in motivating the communities.

  - Villagers must be found and trained to act as motivators of the participants. They should be people from the village and if paid at all, then paid by the communities. This function is of importance to help the communities to believe in the programme and to function effectively on their own.

  - Field organisers, who are able to be the link between the support organisation and the villages. They should be well versed in the development strategy of the support

organisation and should know the local culture and languages well. They should further be able to write activity reports that could assist in a monitoring and evaluation programme. The field organisers will be staff members of the support organisation and employed as such.

- Training possibilities for staff as well as participants are a must, as the programme's progress is dependent on the development of skills by staff and villagers.

- Any strategy should be aware that quality of life is not enhanced only by a bigger cash income, but by a holistic approach that also looks at things like the society, the individual, people's religious or spiritual motivation, the environment and cultural identity.

- The importance of securing rights to natural resources for communities, and to secure equal access and care by community members to and of these resources, will have to be an integrated part of a long term development strategy.

3 The Raffaissen principles that are important for our purposes are that communities or groups build capital through savings; and in order to achieve their development goals, they have to organise themselves into groups. Following the principles of organising and training, they have to improve their skills continuously through training

A conceptual basis for a development strategy

We cannot work out the consequences of each of these details for our development strategy in this paper. What we really want to do here is to provide the conceptual basis of a development strategy that will allow space for all these requirements and which will not contradict them, while at the same time it should be as short and as clear as possible so that any community would understand it. What follows now is the outline of such a conceptual basis for a development strategy. Please note that what is written here does not pretend to be original work. At the core of what I think is most appropriate in our circumstances – working with the San communities – are the well known Raffaissen principles[3] . The crucial issue for us is to suggest an implementation plan that will be culturally adaptable and that will create space for all the above requirements. Since we are also dealing here with what is called a 'culture of poverty', which has much in common with other poor communities around the world, we will be able to make use of what has been established in other programmes with other poor communities.

A very good example is the work of the AKRSP in Pakistan. Over a period of fifteen years it has been implementing a support programme in very poor communities with exceptional success, and much of what it has learnt there has proved to be applicable in our communities.

The broad objectives

The broad objective of our programme is to increase the capacity of local people to solve their own problems so that they can plan and implement their own development programmes that would lead to improving their quality of life.

To do this we should concentrate on establishing community-level institutions for managing development. This will be facilitated by a support organisation which will seek as an entry point an income generating project, one per village, chosen by the villagers. The support organisation will then fund the implementation of this project through a one-time grant and will pay for the labour so that the community will be able to begin a savings programme to create a development capital fund.

The community organisation

It is difficult to say at this stage if the existing village development committees in Botswana

could be used for this purpose, and what other organisational structures already exist at village level in the other countries in the region. The problem with the present structure is that the committee members receive a 'sitting allowance' from government. This leads to a situation where participants of other meetings demand the same and refuse to attend meetings. The result is that in general, community members are not directly involved, the projects are not transparent and the villagers do not take responsibility.

The principle is that we should not be working with committees, but with general meetings, especially in the early years. Therefore I will continue to refer to community organisations to distinguish them from the existing village development committees. -

The community organisation is meant to be a self-sustaining development institution at the village level that can enter into a partnership for development with governmental or private agencies. It is important that all parties, but especially the villagers, should see the community organisation as legitimate and credible. Credibility will depend on it continuing to convey benefits to the members. To have it legitimate and recognised, we will have to try and get the support of the Government for them and later also get some kind of legal registration so that they could enter into a contractual relationship with any donor or government.

To ensure that the community organisation is focused on a holistic development approach with the potential for self-reliance, three fundamental rules have to be observed at all times.

i) The community organisation has to meet as a general body and on a regular basis, preferably weekly and at least once a month.

   This requirement is necessary so that all members might review the needs and performance of their organisation regularly and be assured of transparency. This corresponds to the leadership crises that the San communities have and could pave the way for communities to start taking responsibility for their own development. The responsibility for the comprehensive development of a village in any case cannot be

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undertaken by individuals and committees, for all members must participate in the development process in their community in order to benefit from it. This is also an important mechanism to combat the embezzlement of funds and lessen the chances of problems of jealousy.

ii) The second fundamental rule to be followed is that all members must make savings deposits at their regular meetings.

The accumulation of this equity capital is of paramount importance to the viability of the community organisation. This equity is the anchor to which an entire savings and loans system can be tied. Savings generated by the individual members are the liability of the community organisation, and are announced in public at each meeting. This is a non-cultural activity that is proving successful precisely for that reason. If we talk long-term sustainability, then a community owned capital fund for development will not only teach people to work with money, it will also make them proud of owning it and this will indeed make them less dependent.

iii) Lastly, the members of the village must agree to improve their skills and let the community benefit collectively from their improved skills.
Projects have to begin small or at a level not higher than that of the participants. However they cannot remain like that and as they grow the skills of people will have to grow with them. It is important that the individuals should contribute their skills to the community. Human as well as natural resources will have to be shared as much as possible. Later when the community has the means they could pay for such services. This principle also acknowledges the importance of a process approach to development. People have to grow through stages in order to understand and own the process of development.

The community organisation is the primary unit on which a programme of comprehensive development for the rural areas must be based. In this way the human resources of the rural areas will be incorporated again in our development planning process.

The incentive to organise

How do we find a single activity that will bring the village residents into a group action? It has been said that group action will only be maintained as long as the group's welfare is improved. The problem is to discover an activity that commands broad-based acceptance in a village. We have to accept that, if left to themselves, the villagers are capable of identifying a need, the fulfilment of which would bring the village or interest group together and serve as the glue to bind them in a continuing relationship. Usually this kind of activity will be around an income-generating project. With the San communities the easiest starting point would mostly be to stimulate the production and sales of traditional crafts.

Experience in Pakistan indicates that the construction of infrastructure (for example building a water channel, or constructing a bridge) that will lead to productive activities, can usually induce the kind of broad-based village participation that is so essential to the success of any development effort. In other words, true and lasting community participation can often be obtained only in a project that requires the combined work of the group on an infrastructure that will lead to productive activities as an entry point for subsequent development work. Most projects fail because they cannot find an appropriate entry point for community participation. Clearly, programmes that sponsor extension

education like pre-schools, in areas where the lack of irrigation or land are the foremost problems, cannot be expected to attract broad-based and continuing support from the villagers. The basic idea to have an entry point around which things will start, is part of the conceptual package of the project. The detail of what it is going to be, will differ from place to place.

In each region the situation varies from group to group. The 'entry point' with the agriculturist Humbukushu in Etosha will be different from that of the cattle owners in the south of the country. To find an entry point could be quite difficult. With the San the problem is that they are neither small farmers nor small producers.

As mentioned already, the support organisation gives a one time grant directly to a community organisation in a number of instalments. It has to be done directly to the community organisation to stop the situation where other people are in control of the village funds. Another feature of the grant is the payment of wages to villagers. Experience indicates that the initial infrastructure for a project could require hundreds of man-days to complete, and to expect subsistence holders to continue giving their labour free day in and out is really asking too much. The salaries paid to the members should mostly be equal and furthermore it will also give them the possibility of starting their savings programme.
The concept of self-help should be redefined as villagers' willingness to organise, to generate their own capital through savings, to upgrade their human skills, and to take full responsibility for management including record keeping, implementation, completion and maintenance of the project infrastructure.

Support organisations
The need for a knowledgeable and committed organisation that would accompany the communities in their struggle to sustainability over a long term is undeniable. Normally, such a support organisation would have some distance from the communities in that it would have a Board of skilled and committed members who are not part of the target group. The staff would normally be small and highly motivated. However, in the Kuru example, we are dealing with a 'people's support organisation'. This complicates things remarkably. The Board, as well as the participants, are representatives of the target group, which is in general very poor and not technically skilled to manage such an organisation. As a result a tremendous amount of training has to go into the Board as well as the staff.

The danger of its participants pressing for a state of easy, short term benefits, which could jeopardise the long-term vision of sustainable development, is very present. Luckily, there is a very big 'however' here! In spite of these disadvantages, if the willingness exists with its members, a people's support organisation may bring about the vital force for change that would otherwise not exist. Other benefits are that the organisation already has communication with its target group, all knowledge of the necessary cultural tools exist within the organisation, while it is providing role models and ownership of ideas. Therefore, although Kuru has taken on this very difficult and contradictory task of forming itself from within the target group as a people's support organisation, if it succeeds, the success has the potential of being a remarkable achievement.

Furthermore, a very important – and challenging – task facing development facilitators working with community organisations is to keep them interested by 'feeding' them with activities which are profitable and enhance the ability of rural groups to manage their resources collectively and productively. Sustaining the community organisation to the point

where it can become self-reliant is more difficult than establishing a community organisation. The community organisations should be capable of meeting the development needs of their members on a continuing basis: they must become the all-purpose service organisations for the small farmers or small producers. Their credibility as village-level development institutions will be measured against their performance in 'delivering the goods' to their members. Although this has been the experience of the AKRSP project, it is likewise reinforced by the processes that Kuru has experienced with community organisations up to now.

In the rural areas one of the main obstacles is that services are usually very limited. It is not good enough for people to obtain better skills in tanning for example, if there is no shop that will keep the raw materials in stock, or if there is no plan in place to do the marketing of products. In this context it is clear that another kind of infrastructure is needed that should be provided by the support organisation – an administrative, or extension and supplies infrastructure that would reach all the way to the villages. To begin with, this infrastructure serves to provide villagers with raw materials and with sound advice on the use of these inputs. This type of support helps increase the productivity of the material and the human resources of a village. Subsequently, these channels of input can be used for other inputs and then supplemented with marketing channels for output. At Kuru these functions are undertaken by our 'wholesaler'.

The role of the support organisation is to keep the channels open for inputs, production and training, supporting, or supplementing the efforts of government departments and other agencies working for the development of the area.

There are more reasons why such support is needed:

- a government's capacity for community development work is limited;
- local opportunities and initiatives exist but are hindered by a lack of effective local organisations, skills, capital and appropriate infrastructure;
- special attention needs to be given to the long-term environmental impact of development;
- public funds can be made available to support development, but they usually require administrative and communication skills that the grassroots organisations do not have yet;
- a small and flexible organisation can make a significant contribution to the promotion of local initiatives and the mobilisation of outside resources;
- international development agencies have a limited capacity in reaching the grassroots communities.

The support organisation should be designed to promote development in an equitable and sustainable manner. It is possible that the support organisation will be a self-liquidating organisation, able to work itself out of a job within a fixed period, probably 15 to 20 years. At that time it should leave local organisations and institutions in place that are capable of facilitating continued progress into the future.

Grassroots planning

Even to this very day most of the planning concerning the remote areas is being done in the cities. For the purpose of creating capacity for self-sustained development at the village level,

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Photo: Matthias Hoffer/Kuru Development Trust

planning from the urban centres must give way to planning in the villages. The villagers must be the effective planners, and the planning process must draw upon their knowledge and experience. There are a number of methods for involving the community in making an analysis of their needs and possibilities. At the moment the 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' method is very popular. Through various techniques it enables the community to come up with a holistic development plan. Although very good, this method is very time consuming and takes a lot of staff resources that are not always available. Recently a method known as 'Triple A' has been introduced by UNICEF to Botswana. The goal here is to get all the players such as NGOs and the government to work out a development plan together with the villages, but then with a monitoring system that will empower the communities to hold the role players responsible for what they have undertaken to deliver.

As we now stress the importance of the quality of life versus cash income only, at all times there should be a discussion about the values that are important to the communities and about the goals they want to achieve with development. The above and other methods all have the same goal, namely to give control and a sense of ownership to the communities over the development processes that they find themselves in.

To demonstrate yet another alternative I include here what the AKRSP calls the 'Diagnostic Survey'. This survey is a joint effort by the community and development workers, and is a process in which they together analyse the present situation and create a development plan that addresses it. The plan is created through a process of meetings and workshops in the community that are facilitated by the support organisation. In AKRSP's case this method has proved very successful. The point is that there are many different tools that we can use as long as we are clear about the goals we want to achieve.

In the process Kuru is undertaking, there are three series of dialogues. The first takes place around the identification process, the second around the preparation phase, and the third the appraisal. The coordinator (who is the chief executive officer of the support organisation), initiates the first dialogue by explaining the methods and objectives of the support

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organisation to the villagers. (The coordinator as well as other senior staff members should be in the field as much as possible). She or he then invites them to identify an income generating programme that would benefit most of the households in the village and that can be undertaken by the villagers themselves. The experience is that almost invariably, villagers are able to agree on a programme of overriding importance to all the villagers. Thus the result of the first dialogue is the identification of a small, productive programme by the residents of a village. This first series of dialogues might consist of a number of visits.

The identification of the programme is followed by a second series of dialogues. The first step here involves a feasibility survey of the proposed scheme. A field unit of the support organisation works with informed village residents to assess the feasibility of proposed programmes and to obtain data on prices of locally available inputs/materials. It is on the basis of information obtained locally that blueprints and cost estimates are prepared by the field unit and sent to the management group for finalisation.

The finalised scheme is taken to the management group and discussed with it. This starts the third dialogue in which the support organisation and the residents of the village explore the terms of partnership that would characterise the relationship between the two entities. On behalf of the support organisation these terms are explained as general principles of rural development that have proved successful elsewhere in the world. In turn the villagers demonstrate their acceptance of these terms by spelling out precisely the manner in which they would organise to plan, implement, manage and maintain specific programmes that involve physical work, how they would commit themselves to skills development and the creation of equity capital over time. At this stage a community organisation is formed, consisting of all beneficiaries of the programme.

In practice each phase of the programme cycle might require several visits by the staff, so that every dialogue is really a series of open-ended dialogues. This approach to programme identification at the village level is fundamental to the establishment of a viable entry point for subsequent development work. It has the virtue of being directed at all village residents. The results are easily verifiable in any assembly of villagers. Finally the diagnostic survey helps create bonds between villagers and the support organisation personnel.

Co-operative management of rural resources

Capital

We are all doubtful about the wisdom of a cash economy, especially when contrasted with the beauty of the hunter-gatherer social society. There is however, no way out in the present day circumstances, especially where resources like land have mostly been lost. The sooner these communities start to position themselves in such a way that they will become independent from donor handouts and empowered to claim their rightful positions concerning their own development and future, the better. One thing is that we have to accept that the survival of rural communities is inexorably linked to their access to financial resources. This means that Kuru has undertaken to make every effort to teach people how the cash economy works. Again the principle of collective management of resources and individual production is to be maintained. The idea is to make widespread banking operations possible for small farmers and small producers. The community organisation is declared eligible for credit from the support organisation if it agrees to take collective responsibility for accumulating the savings and

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recovering the loans of its members. The savings are the security under which the support organisation underwrites loans from a revolving fund of the support organisation itself to the community organisation. This is necessary because access to commercial banks for poor people is almost impossible.

For more information see the section on 'Credit and savings' on page 27.

Skills

The idea is to let the whole community organisation benefit from the skills of its members. It is one forum in which the rare resource embodied in an entrepreneurial development activist is put to use directly for an entire community. The community organisation in turn compensates the activist for his or her services to the community. The community organisation also undertakes to nominate more of its members, over time, for representing the community in special tasks such as banking, marketing, and so on.

Land

Land, together with the rest of the natural resources are scarce commodities which, like most other resources, communities have to use co-operatively to benefit the community as a whole.

Equitable and democratic development

There is no way around the fact that the community organisation has to meet as regularly as possible with all members present. Culturally, it is unacceptable for a committee of a few people to manage the finances and other development issues on behalf of the whole village. If a committee would try to do it the community will immediately distrust all activities and will refuse to take responsibility for its own future. The more these meetings take place, the faster people will be empowered to manage their own affairs. The community organisation has to elect at least two officials, a chairperson and a manager, but it does not elect a committee to manage the community organisation. It may elect committees of members for specific activities, such as resolving disputes, enforcing decisions of the general body on free grazing and so on. It is through the regular meetings of the general body that the supremacy of the members is assured. Too many times have we seen that executive committees can destroy a very good cooperative movement.

The role of lay members in keeping the community organisation on the right track has to be continuously emphasised. The members must insist on being informed of community organisation accounts, savings and other matters. The general body meetings ensure public knowledge of the affairs of the community organisation and act as a deterrent against corruption. A general body meeting sits in judgement on all complaints pertaining to members of the community organisation and its office bearers. The role of the general body in achieving equitable, productive, sustainable development and growth with social justice at the village level, has been established beyond any doubt. It also acts as the most effective mechanism against the hijacking of the community organisation by vested interests. It further takes away the burden of resolving community organisation disputes from the programme staff and puts it fairly and squarely in the court of the community organisation.

The role of community activists

Finding activists at village level who will motivate and lead the communities to get involved and to take responsibility for their own future, is the single most important factor in the sustainability of a community organisation. It is the activists who help the community

organisation understand the vision of development; who give their time and make sacrifices to take programme messages to the general body of the community organisation; who in short, are the moving spirit behind the community organisation. They are people who sincerely want to improve the situation of their co-villagers along with their own. The community organisation provides these people with the forum to achieve this objective. Without this forum, everyone in the village is left to their own devices to further their cause. No wonder individuals with some resources, connections and entrepreneurship leave others not so fortunate far behind.

The success or failure of a community organisation is directly related to whether there is an activist element in the village, that should in one way or another take on a motivational role in the community's development. If it is the manager, he or she is supported by a group of village specialists, trained by programme staff and remunerated by the community organisation members. At Kuru we have found that this is one of the most difficult issues to understand for the San, and it has to do with their lack of a directive leadership tradition. We are trying to overcome the problem by combining the role of the village activists and that of the extension teams, and by putting a lot of effort into training. This will be discussed in the next point.

The trap not to fall into is to take an outside development worker to reside on a semi-permanent basis in the community. While this might work in some places, and has been crucial in areas where trust in development efforts had to be built up from the start, with the San communities this can easily give them an opportunity to stand back again.

The extension teams

The practical implementation of the development strategy falls very much on the shoulders of the people who form the direct link between the communities and the support organisation. In most programmes you would here have highly trained staff that would go around the villages and have meetings with them. However, as in the case of the community activists, we are in desperate need of role models for the San communities. We also need people who can speak the local languages and who understand the cultures very well. Here Kuru has designed a situational strategy by giving attention to the people's capacities and culturally acceptable approaches.

Even in the absence of university graduates, Kuru is still making use of San people to visit communities, but instead of using one person we have a team of about five people. Such a team would consist of two community mobilisers, one secretary, one pre-school and women's groups assistant, plus other technical staff like craft buyers and savings assistants. The community mobilisers are older people and as such are accepted to address communities, and most of them have practical experience with community development work. The secretaries are generally young and have just left secondary school. All these people are San, and we hope to achieve a situation where the communities will get used to seeing San in responsible positions and willing to stand up and take the lead. The idea is to help the communities in the beginning to put up a schedule for their weekly meetings and to let the extension team attend them until such time that the communities will be able to organise themselves.

Credit and savings

The generation of collective capital by the community organisation should be a prerequisite condition set by the support organisation. It will have to be a major item on the development partnership agenda agreed between the community organisation members and the support

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organisation. For the community organisation the generation of collective capital not only allows it access to further development resources, it is also a great source of pride for the members as they have created a new non-traditional common property. To manage this new resource efficiently the support organisation will have to provide the necessary guidance.

The community organisation could act as an informal bank for the members. The members deposit their savings with the community organisation which are recorded in its savings register and stated in the savings book issued to members by the community organisation. The cumulative savings are deposited in one of the scheduled banks or post offices, in the name of the community organisation and operated by two authorised signatories (the chairperson and manager) nominated through a general body resolution. No withdrawals can be effected from the community organisation savings without the prior approval of the support organisation's coordinator or his or her nominees. This authority is obtained through a community organisation resolution lodged with the bank or post office branch concerned.

The support organisation will provide training to the community organisation representatives in book keeping, and it should have field accountants that regularly visit the community organisations to check the records and to provide on the job training in record and account keeping. Experience indicates that the support organisation must have an intensive field orientation so that there is regular contact between community organisation representatives and support organisation staff. This intensive interaction is necessary as parallel experience shows clearly that where people have confidence in an organisation's ability to deliver benefits to members, and trust the record keeping process, these organisations maintain the members' interest and loyalty.

The savings can be used as collateral to obtain credit for development activities by the community organisation. Perhaps in the beginning, it is best if only the community organisation and not individuals take loans. Later on a revolving fund, not bigger than the savings, can be earmarked for each community organisation. Then each community organisation will have the responsibility to extend credit to its members for entrepreneurial or consumption purposes.

CONCLUSION

When it changed into a regional support organisation, Kuru adopted all these 'aspects of a development strategy', and called it: 'community owned development'. Up to now we have had mixed success with the implementation. After one year, the main difficulty was to persuade all the existing projects to accept the new strategy. This was not easy because the communities were used to the fact that 'other' people will look for more funds; that the ever present project advisors from outside would find solutions; that if their lives did not improve it meant that Kuru and other development agents were not doing their work ... Now the responsibility is more clearly with the communities and real sustainability is within reach for the first time.

We were very concerned about whether the savings project would capture the imagination of the participants who had no history or culture of such an activity. Now we are able to say that eight communities saved a combined amount of BWP 60,000 in their first year. The first loans have been given to communities for development activities that they have chosen, based on their savings, and we are anxiously waiting to see how they will pay it back.

The implementation of the programme in new areas looks much more promising. The different aspects needed to take the communities to sustainable development are in place. What remains to be seen is whether Kuru will be able to develop viable projects with and for the communities, and whether a people owned development support organisation will in the long run be able to resist the pressures from the participants to give in to a handout strategy. In a dry, harsh environment such as the Kalahari, isolated and unpredictable, this is not easy.

Wish us luck!

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